

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 4/9/2024 2:46:19 AM

First name: Frederick

Last name: Spence

Organization:

Title:

Comments: I am concerned that the Telephone Gap project and the Plan do not consider and value the role that old trees play in sequestering carbon. We know from climate change scientists Beverly Law and William Moomaw that " Forests pull about one-third of all human-caused carbon dioxide emissions from the atmosphere each year. Researchers have calculated that ending deforestation and allowing mature forests to keep growing could enable forests to take up twice as much carbon." So keeping large trees in the ground is an incredibly effective and cheap way to reduce climate change. This project goes in exactly the wrong direction. It will increase climate change by releasing carbon as these trees are removed, and by preventing these valuable trees from continuing their free carbon removal and storage services. This project should be cancelled.

Killing trees not only releases carbon into the atmosphere, but also sacrifices a critical pathway for carbon absorption long into the future. Due to decades of logging, American forests now have far less biomass than they would have if managed by mother nature. Deforestation is a key accelerant of the climate crisis.

Our hope for avoiding climate catastrophe rests on the carbon equation of the next decade, not decades from now when trees cut down could be replaced with regrowth. Mature and old-growth forests excel at removing and storing carbon from the atmosphere. And yet, 92% of the areas proposed for logging in the Telephone Gap timber sale are classified as mature or old by the Green Mountain National Forest, violating President Biden's historic Executive Order from Earth Day 2022, which directed the US Forest Service to protect these forests for the benefit of the climate and biodiversity.

Mature and old forests matter for a lot more reasons than the carbon that they store. These same forests are also powerhouses for biodiversity, clean water, and climate resilience. Many of New England's most imperiled species, including pine marten, Northern Long-eared Bats, and brook trout, thrive in healthy, old forests. Old forests excel at removing the phosphorus and nitrogen that drive algal blooms and dead zones in our rivers, lakes, and ponds. And they are exceptional at reducing the impacts of both floods and droughts, by slowing, sinking, and storing water.

Forest trees provide the enormous benefits such as stabilizing local climate by transferring heat from land surfaces to higher in the atmosphere and buffering temperature extremes. On a global scale, forests reduce earth's temperature about 0.5 degrees C. Trees release water vapor and biogenic volatile organic compounds (BVOCs) which promotes cloud formation, and contributes further to cooling and formation of condensation nuclei, more cloud formation, and ultimately precipitation. Intact forests play an enormous role in global and regional terrestrial water cycles.

Logging requires road building and skid trails leaving lasting ecosystem damage: soil compaction, surface erosion, increased stream sedimentation, degraded water quality and aquatic habitat, reduced biodiversity, spread of invasive vegetation, and suppression of forest regeneration.

Logging damages remaining trees, and does not "restore" forest health. Through underground mazes of roots, fungi, and bacteria called "mycorrhizal networks," trees share resources like water and nutrients, helping each other survive stresses. Forest thinning disrupts these mycorrhizal networks leaving remaining trees more vulnerable to disease, pest attack, and drought, shortening their life span.

Research by the University of Vermont shows that New England forests could store 2 to 4 times more carbon if we just let them grow old. Letting mature and old trees stand is one of the most effective things that we can do to combat climate change and extinction.

Private forests are the source of 96% of the timber supply in Vermont, so protecting public forests would have minimal impact on the wood products economy. We must put our public forests on a different path.

You must cancel this destructive project that has absolutely no public benefit and would accelerate and exacerbate climate change and extinction.